

By Michelle Barclay, Assistant Director, Children, Families and the Courts

"Georgia leads the nation in the number of adults under some sort of correctional control.... We owe people a better way of managing our society's problems...and the needle is moving in the right direction, but we need to do even more....we have to start our reform efforts in our schools to help our most at risk children."

Quote from Judge [Michael Boggs](#) , Co-Chair of the Criminal Justice Reform Council.

The Criminal Justice Reform Council has been steadily working since 2011 to recommend reforms targeted toward reducing Georgia's prison population without compromising public safety. A full report of this work is located here: <http://gov.georgia.gov/documents/ga-criminal-justice-reform-council-report>



Most recently, Judge Boggs, among others, is asking the judiciary to engage our local educational leaders and systems, to make sure that our schools are part of this same reform work. While schools are focused on educating our children, they are also our first government institutions that can be part of the team for identifying children who need extra help with their soft skills and their capacity to maintain relationships.

[Research](#) from the CDC states that:

"Students who feel connected to their school are also more likely to have better academic achievement, including higher grades and test scores, have better school attendance, and stay in school longer.

The Georgia Department of Education has embarked on a series of efforts to help children feel connected to their schools through [PBIS](#) (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) programs and has also been providing [public school climate ratings](#).

In a quest to further promote the collaboration between many people and institutions, the first School Justice Partnership Summit was held in Chatham County Georgia in April 2015. The summit was hosted by the Chatham County Juvenile Court with Judge LeRoy Burke as the lead speaker. The summit also included Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice Commissioner Avery Niles, Judge Boggs, Dr. Garry McGiboney from the Georgia Department of Education, Sharon Hill of GA Appleseed along with a panel of local leaders which included Dr. Thomas Lockamy Superintendent of Savannah-Chatham Public Schools and Dr. Quentina Miller Fields also with Savannah-Chatham Public Schools. Dekalb County Juvenile Court Judge Vincent Crawford (once a student in the Savannah-Chatham County School System) served as the panel moderator. In addition to the speakers, sponsors of the School Justice summit included the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, Georgia Administrative Office of the

Courts, the State Bar of Georgia, Emory University's Barton Child Law and Policy Center, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

To view the archived video from the first summit, see: <http://cjcc.georgia.gov/dmc>

A second School Justice Summit will be held on October 9, 2015 hosted by the Fulton County Juvenile Court in partnership with both Fulton County and Atlanta Public Schools. It will be streamed live and archived. Keep checking the Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children [LiveStream Account](#) for details.